

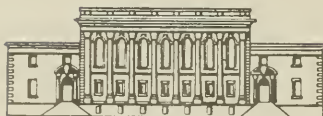
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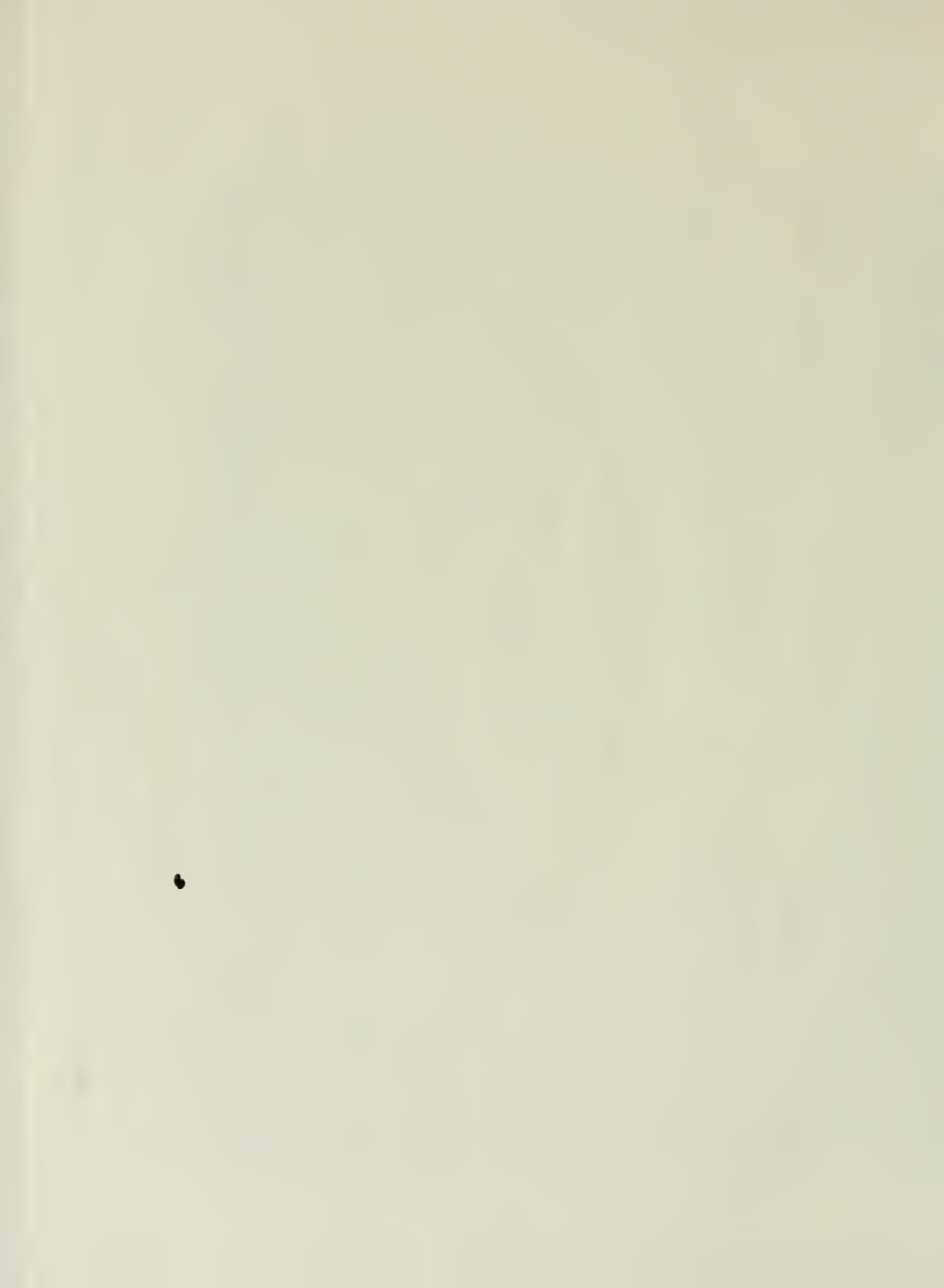


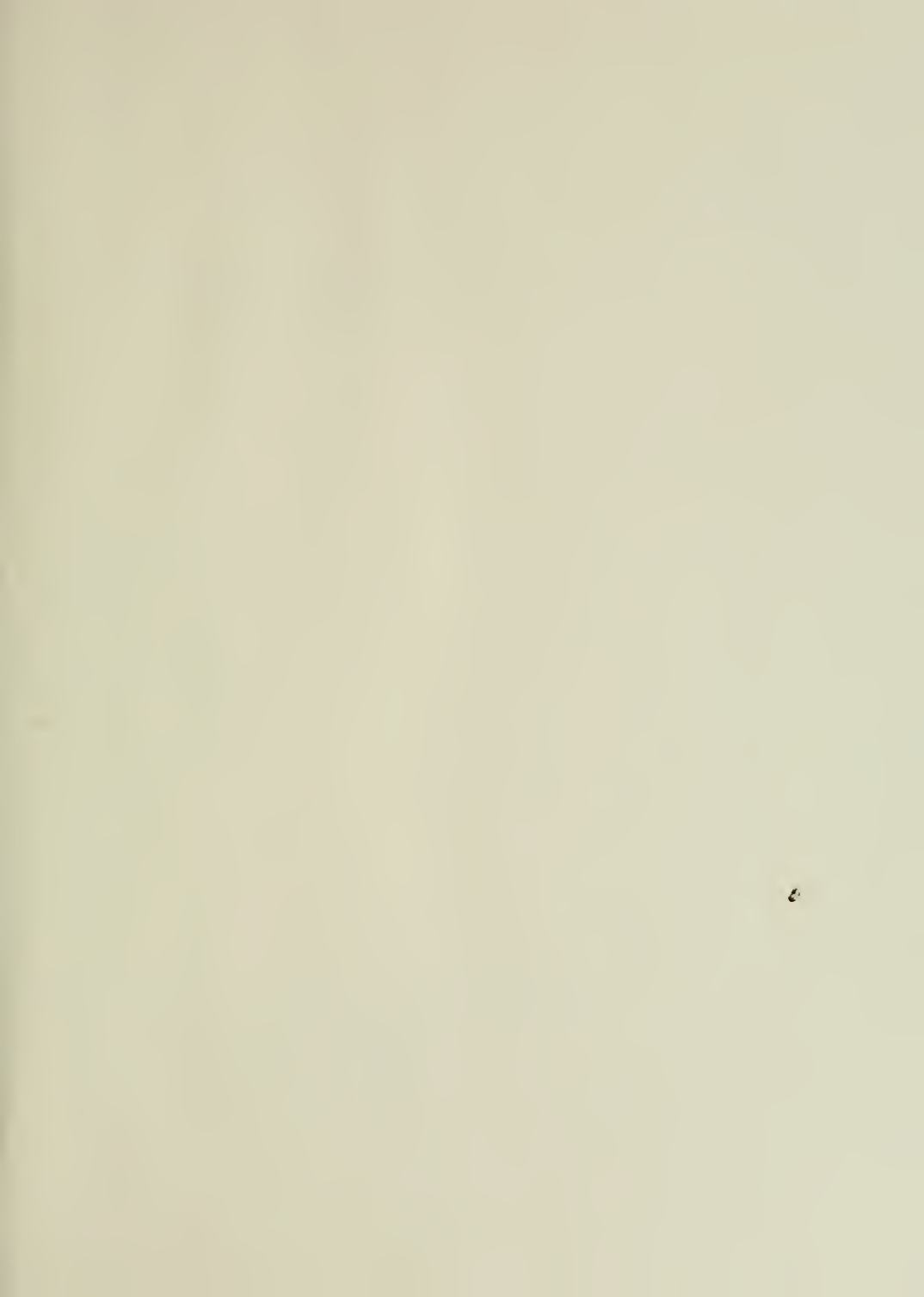
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AMERICAN COLLECTORS  
OF FRENCH IMPRESSIONIST ART 1876-1913  
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## PREFACE

The interrelationship between France and America has been a favorite theme of mine for some time and led to my Junior Honors Project: Americans in Paris 1869-1903. In this work I focused on the writings of Henry James and Mark Twain, comparing their personal and fictional views of Paris with my own, for I was studying in France on Sweet Briar's program. I found a pattern existed through all these voyages beginning with a preconceived ideal of Paris, later tempered by actually viewing and criticizing the city, followed by growing disillusionment and a desire to return to the United States.

This Senior Honors thesis is a direct development of my junior year work, for I wished to explore further the preconceived view of Paris. I knew that Paris was associated with fashion and culture, yet I wished to discover the extent to which Americans were aware of French art, especially Impressionism. Today Paris is synonymous with Impressionism, yet in the nineteenth century this art was not even popular in France.

As my research developed my topic was narrowed to include only those American collectors of Impressionist art between 1876 and 1913. I wished to examine the total environment of the collectors, how they discovered Impressionism, where they bought it, why they were attracted to it, and what happened to



their collections after they died. I focused on collectors in Philadelphia, New York, Boston and Chicago and developed the artistic and historic milieu of each city, describing the exhibits and events of the period. This study opens with the 1876 exhibit in Philadelphia and closes with the Armory Show in New York in 1913. In each city the collectors of Impressionism are presented in context with their precursors, collectors of Barbizon works, and their successors, collectors of "modern" French art (Matisse and Picasso).

I wish to thank the following people for their help, encouragement, and advice throughout this lengthy process: thesis advisor Ms. Diane Moran and major advisor Mr. Paul Taylor; proof readers and critics Mr. Gerald Berg and Ms. Lisa Rogness; computer consultants Mr. Robert Chase and Mr. John Savarese; typists Annika Olsson and Marijtje Van Duijn; and my other friends and family who tolerated my many ups and downs. This work is dedicated to all of them. Thank you.



## UNIT I: History and Advisors

In the late nineteenth century America was on the verge of being accepted as a premier nation. As Rene Brimo points out in *L'Evolution du Gout aux Etats-Unis*, in 1876 America was working towards unity and economic stability, with a growing population that resulted in great urban development (p. 76). 1876 brought the centennial celebration of our country's rise to independence and, for the first time since the Civil War, America seemed to be united politically and morally. Yet this was also a celebration of America's growth, of the industry and commerce that had brought such prosperity. America had grown richer financially, demographically and territorially. The national population grew from thirty-eight million in 1870 to fifty million in 1880, and ninety million by 1910 [1]. Her territorial expansion had traversed the continent by this time, existing cities swelled and small frontier towns obtained urban status within a few short years. Despite this growth and nationalistic pride Americans turned to Europe for art and culture.

Many Americans, with newly earned wealth and leisure time, began collecting art. In Chapter One, we will see how art collecting was not only a channel for their excess wealth, but also provided personal and community benefits, including a prominent social position paralleled to that of the great art patrons of the Renaissance. Collectors felt that by





purchasing art and bringing it to America they were increasing America's (and their city's) cultural wealth and developing the artistic taste of Americans as a whole. The desire to travel was widespread, for Europe held all the treasures of past empires and monarchies. France proved particularly alluring, and the new Impressionist art was intriguing. This study will examine why some Americans were so interested in Impressionist art rather than the Old Masters, and how they became aware of these artists and their works.

In Chapter Two, we will examine the various exhibits, dealers, and artists that influenced the collectors to purchase art, in particular Impressionist art. The exhibits ranged from the 1876 Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia to the 1893 Columbian Exhibition in Chicago and the Armory Show in New York in 1913. The advisors who were dealers, artists, and friends included Joseph Duveen, Paul Durand-Ruel, and Mary Cassatt, each of whom developed the taste of a whole group of collectors.



## Chapter One: Introduction

In Art Collecting in the United States of America, Constable writes that "After the Civil War, industry and commerce in the United States developed rapidly, wealth increased, new centres of population were established and grew apace, and contacts with Europe multiplied. Consciousness of the interest and importance of the arts likewise extended among the well-to-do, sometimes as a result of a genuine understanding and feeling, more often because the arts could be a potent means of demonstrating wealth and social position" [2]. Americans of the late 19th century became more aware of the arts, and the art of collecting developed. Europe seemed to be the natural place to turn for art, and France in particular opened her doors. The type of art bought reflected to some extent the collector's private and public views.

We have seen how America's growth in the 19th century produced people with wealth and leisure time. Yet an initial appreciation of the arts took many years to develop, for art seemed an extravagance that hard working "rags-to-riches" Americans could not accept. Through travel these rich Americans began to realize the extent of their cultural deprivation. They found that their new wealth enabled them to surround themselves with treasures from all over the world. Towner writes: "In the decades following the Civil War, art collecting, the ultimate luxury, proof that a man could afford



the utterly inutile, came into vogue with the virulence of an epidemic" [3]. Perhaps hesitantly and then with more and more assurance, Americans began to buy works of art. Early collecting seemed to be somewhat random, with no pattern and no true understanding of the works acquired. Gradually collections began to reflect their owner's interests, and collectors found that others admired them for what they possessed.

Henry James repeatedly portrays these materialistic people in his novels. Jackson Lears writes of *The Portrait of a Lady*: "In the embryonic consumer culture of the late nineteenth century, more and more Americans were being encouraged to 'express themselves' (like Madame Merle) not through independent accomplishment but through the ownership of things" [4]. Collections began to achieve a form of their own, to become more than a mere assemblage of objects and to be, rather, a reflection of the collector's personality. James illustrates this phenomenon in *Portrait of a Lady* for Osmond's most striking characteristic is his "adorable taste."

These collectors, with their newly earned wealth, sensed the instability of their position and longed to identify themselves with the monarchs of Europe. They began to see themselves as patrons of the arts, not merely as rich men trying to live like kings. The "mecenat" attitude justified the frivolous dispensing of money on paintings; Lears writes:



"Acquisition of the art of the past could buttress one's prestige in the present. . . " [5].

Not only did collecting enhance social standing and respect, but it also proved to be a great escape from the drudgery and exhaustion of the modern world. Leisure time was earned through labor, and the wealthy were burdened with their own form of responsibility and overwork. Collecting paintings proved to be a relaxing hobby, a means of creative release. Works of art added something beautiful in their lives and brought them closer to the physical act of creating, something that seemed distant in a machine age. As Lears notes: "All these collectors used premodern art to create a realm of beauty where they could withdraw - however temporarily - from nervous strain" [6]. In addition to emotional release, collecting provided a permanent identity in the changing world. Historical periods are more easily remembered by the physical objects they produce than by the achievements of one man. One's business and financial success may tarnish or collapse but one's collection will always have value.

Yet the escapism motive towards collecting is only one part of the great movement towards creativity and personal expression that includes the Arts and Crafts movement. In contrast to a more impersonal, highly mechanised age, art collecting and handicrafts provided an outlet for man's imagination, his inner creativity. This led to a





back-to-nature movement that glorified the physical professions and the land, eventually leading to the founding of national parks in 1890. Higham writes: "The activism of the nineties contributed, therefore, to the hearty interest that progressive intellectuals showed in doing things, in closing with the immediate practical realities, in concentrating on techniques rather than sweeping theories" [7]. It is perhaps this escape to nature, the physical and the concrete, that inspired some Americans to admire the French Barbizon painters and the Impressionists.

However, collecting proved to be more than consumerism and emotional therapy. Collectors proclaimed that they were enriching the nation's culture and helping to develop taste in America. La Farge writes: "There comes a moment in every manner of civilization when the work of art has both a real and a conventional need as a manner of enriching the otherwise meagre external life. In the great communities into which wealth has come rapidly, the tendency is to continue the accumulation of wealth through works of art the value of which is already established, and for that, to go outside of the country to other lands where previous accumulations exist"



[8]. Americans had been so busy earning money that, in comparison with Europe, they had completely neglected the arts. They had earned a place in the world economically and demographically, however culturally they were far behind. The early collectors took it upon themselves to remedy a situation which seemed irreparable in the early 19th century: "Trying to carve a place for the arts in the hearts of one's countrymen in America in 1800 was like chipping a statue out of a block of ice. It was a cold, hard thing to start with, and you could see what you had been to so much trouble to make melt before your eyes as soon as it took shape" [9].

By 1876 with the economic, demographic, and geographic changes that had occurred since the beginning of the century, Americans were beginning to realize their country's growing, world-wide importance, and the struggle to establish firmly the arts in American society gained a foothold. Private collections grew due to excess funds and collectors joined ranks with the new art historians on the "crusade of American taste": "They were also determined to make the arts as



respectable in America as in Europe and artists as acceptable in drawing rooms as anyone who was looked up to for his wealth or status." [10]. To educate the public and the artists, art societies were developed in many of the major urban centers of the nation.

It was in these individual cities that collectors had the largest impact. In Philadelphia, Boston, New York, and Chicago collectors adapted their personal desire to accumulate treasures to a sense of pride in their city. In their travels around Europe, Americans saw how individuals, cities, and even countries were remembered for the treasures they possessed, hence to assure their own and their city's immortality they needed to accumulate great treasures. Collectors began to realize that their collections could do them more credit if they gave them away, if they bought works of art to establish museums, for by increasing the pride of their city they became heroes in the eyes of the public. Fuller's novel *With the Procession* describes life in 19th century Chicago, amid great developments and wealth. An "old family" is trying to regain the social position it lost to newcomers, and community



service is one method that they use. The father is advised by a friend: "... things are beginning to be different?-that the man who enjoys the best position and the most consideration is not the man who is making money, but the man who gives it away - not the man who is benefitting himself, but the man who is benefitting the community. There is an art to cultivate David - the art of giving. Give liberally and rightly, and nothing can bring you more credit." [11].

Not only men were involved in these philanthropic duties. Women began to assert themselves in the beginning of the 19th century and by the 1880's they had gained a secure foothold in the public view. Their interests outside the home were more widely accepted, and they began to be seen as women, not just as mothers and wives. Rene Brimo writes that women worked towards political, economic, and intellectual equality in the middle of the 19th century, and that many women were able to get an education and participate in intellectual, literary, and artistic movements. These developments are important for they allowed for the development of a woman artist, Mary Cassatt, who in turn influenced women collectors such as Mrs. Potter Palmer and Mrs. H.O. Havemeyer.

We have seen the historical and personal reasons as to why collectors in general began to collect, yet their reasons for choosing French art and in particular Impressionist art remain to be explored. France had, since the American





Revolution, been a very attractive and romantic country to Americans, with its long history and its glorious personalities that included such men as the Marquis de Lafayette and Napoleon. Its philosophers were greatly admired and followed by statesmen such as Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin, and the art collections in the Louvre were among the greatest in the world. Thomas Gold Appleton said: "Good Americans, when they die, go to Paris" [12]. This allure of France prompted a growing impulse to travel, and as early as 1873, 25,00 American tourists annually visited Europe, marking the era of the Grand Tour [13]. Lears writes: "During the years after 1816, when the first steam-packet service between New York and Liverpool was established, the stream of American tourists swelled steadily. Recording their experiences in abundant travel literature, they created images of European culture for their less fortunate countrymen"[14]. These writers of travel literature included Mark Twain and Henry James.

Both writers, James in particular, comment on the wealth of history and art in Europe. To be a properly cultivated gentleman required the knowledge of Europe, its history, museums and monuments. Yet Europe could be too enticing, preventing the desire or will to return home. "Was it at all possible, for instance, to like Paris enough without liking it too much?" [15]. James and many others preferred Europe to



America, and in *The Innocents Abroad*, Mark Twain describes the attractiveness of Paris: "Two hundred people sat at little tables on the sidewalk, sipping wine and coffee; the streets were thronged with light vehicles and with joyous pleasure-seekers; there was music in the air, life and action all about us..."[16].

Not only were tourists travelling to Europe, but artists and collectors as well. Their love and admiration for France made it an artistic mecca for many, including the architects Richard Morris Hunt and Henry Hobson Richardson who trained at the *Ecole des Beaux-Arts*. The French salon and academy ruled the Parisian art world and naturally were the early centers of American admiration. The American artists who visited France helped to stimulate a greater interest in the arts and to encourage American collectors to travel abroad actually to meet French artists and collectors.

Yet not only was French academic art popular, but beginning with the Barbizon school, Americans began to look outside the academy to other contemporary French artists. For some collectors, contemporary art seemed better to reflect and harmonize with their world, and unlike the Old Masters or Italian Primitives, required very little if any previous understanding of art. They wished to find an art of their time rather than the art of the past. Thus while the new, non-academic art being produced by such artists as Corot in



Barbizon was not really popular in France, William Morris Hunt (a painter who studied in France) found many supporters for it in America. For many reasons, Americans were more liberal than the French in accepting these new forms of art. The art was approachable and the main themes were found in everyday life. In addition, America had no great collections of past art like the Louvre nor any national academy which set up standards for art, thus the new art would seem less shocking. (There were art academies in Philadelphia and New York but their influence was not as dominant as that of the Academie des Beaux Arts in Paris). As American society was constantly changing and evolving, artistic taste was not static and new styles were more quickly adopted than in Europe. Strahan writes in 1880: "For the art of the old masters we have to go to the Vatican and the Louvre. But there is a great modern art, which is the development of this century, and for which it is to be accountable to posterity. . . For this art, on which posterity will sit in equity, America will be the judgement-hall, for its Vaticans and Louvres are here"[17].

The Barbizon artists were the first contemporary French artists that Americans purchased. Their use of rural landscapes as inspiration was very popular with the Americans, especially those under the tutelage of Hunt. Nearly all the major collections of the middle of the 19th century included Barbizon works. Hunt worked with the Barbizon artists and



"...was at the centre of a movement which was essentially a revolt against the Salon and its standards"[18]. The acceptance of Barbizon artists paved the way for the acceptance of Impressionist art, a much more radical attack on the Salon. William Merritt Chase worked hard to make the Impressionists accepted by American collectors and artists, just as Hunt had done for the Barbizon artists. James's novel, *The Reverberator*, refers to the new Impressionist art being produced in Paris. In the novel, Mr. Flack encourages two young Americans to have their portrait painted by an Impressionist artist ". . . for it was well known that Impressionism was going to be the art of the future. . . ." [19]. But they needed convincing, for their first impression was not favorable. Flack said, however, that ". . . once they had got used to Impressionism they would never look at anything else"[20].

However it was not merely America's desire for a depiction of the contemporary world, or its acceptance of liberal ideas, or its previous acceptance of Barbizon artists that led to its approval of Impressionist art. Collectors found the theme of landscape and nature beautiful, coinciding with their desire to escape from their increasingly industrialized society. Lears writes that "A distaste for the ugliness spread by industrial capitalism, a nostalgia for a 'green and pleasant land' - these sentiments have survived





throughout the twentieth century" [21]. Yet, regardless of all these tendencies towards Impressionism, it was still a minority of the population who appreciated this new art, as is reflected in this view of a 19th century art exhibit: "On the whole they seemed to prefer story pictures to landscapes, and they heartily disliked the Impressionists. 'Why, that isn't painting, ' one visitor said of an Impressionist landscape. 'That's paint'" [22].



## Chapter Two: Exhibits and Advisors

America in the late 19th century, with its vast territories, extreme wealth, growing population, and desire to enrich its culture, produced an environment where collectors flourished. To be aware of art and to have a desire to purchase it is only part of the process, for the collector must learn to amass works of art rather than just "bibelots". It was the exhibits of the day and advisors such as dealers and artists that cultivated the taste of American collectors, and aided them in amassing some of the greatest collections in the world.

The exhibits of the period (1876-1913) provided the prospective collector with a brief glimpse of the wonders of the world without leaving his own country. Brimo writes: "These kinds of magnificent ephemeral museums [big exhibits]. . . exposed unknown things, and developed the taste of the collector. The number of collectors grew in addition to art historians, critics and antiquarians"[23]. The exhibits not only increased the number of people within the field of art, but reached the general public and exposed them to art, often for the very first time. Vast exhibits made much of the country more aware of art and helped to create a welcome environment for the collector to thrive.



As previously explained, 1876 was a critical year in America's history, because for the first time since the Civil War the country was united in the celebration of its Centennial of Independence. The Exposition in Philadelphia was a mammoth affair that was influential throughout the country. In its huge exhibition buildings it presented to thousands of visitors the technological achievements of America along with articles from all over the world. The Memorial Art Hall was described as: "' the most inspiring and ornate of all the structures'"[24],and it cost \$1,500,000 to build. As Saarinen describes it in the Proud Possessors,the art building's "75,000 square feet of wall space was plastered with paintings"[25]. The exposition's impact was tremendous.

The Centennial Exhibition firmly turned America's eyes towards Europe to explore the vast treasures that the Old World had created. The works of art in the Memorial Art Hall gave American artists a good example of the past to use as models for their work, and even introduced contemporary foreign art. Many different styles, periods, and countries were represented and were nearly all appreciated by an art starved America. Over two hundred French paintings were exhibited by artists such as: Castelman, Cassagne, Garnier, Becker and Clement along with "some good genre pictures." This exhibit inspired the diverse collecting that continued for the rest of the 19th century and filled the nation's museums with



art treasures. As Lynes writes: "It was the Centennial Exhibition of 1876 in Philadelphia, by all odds the greatest world's fair ever to have astonished anyone, that put 'art' in America on a lofty, if not very secure, pedestal"[26].

Philadelphia's exhibit of 1876 helped to encourage Americans to collect art, and later exhibits led them towards Impressionist art. The art of the past seemed particularly attractive for it represented the culture that America desired, and the Old Masters involved no risk of judgement like contemporary art. Three exhibits of the late 19th century enticed Americans with the recent work of Parisian artists. The first of these was a series of small exhibits of Mary Cassatt's work. The Pennsylvania Academy in Philadelphia showed a few Cassatt paintings in their exhibits of 1876, 1878, and 1879, and New York exhibited Cassatt works at the National Academy of Design in 1878, and at the Society of American Artists in 1879 [27]. Cassatt was an American artist working in Paris with Degas and the Impressionists, making these paintings "'probably the first Impressionist pictures shown in America'" [28]. In 1881 a Mr. Brownell writes of Cassatt's paintings: "'Her work is a good example of the better sort of 'impressionism,' and the sureness with which, contrary to the frequent notion of it, this proceeds...'" [29]. Four years after the Cassatt exhibit, in 1883, William Merritt Chase and Carroll Beckwith ". . .in an attempt to





raise funds toward building the pedestal for the Statue of Liberty on Bedloe's Island in New York harbor, put on a show of paintings [in New York] which included not only Barbizon pictures but Impressionist as well" [30].

The largest and most important exhibit of Impressionist art was in New York in 1886. The American Art Association, run by Thomas Kirby and James F. Sutton was having trouble convincing New Yorkers to buy American art. Sutton was sent to Europe to find some enticing art gems and was intrigued by the Impressionists. "He was reminded that they were lunatics and incompetents, according to reports from Paris. The same effect could be had by tying a brush to a donkey's tail" [31]. In Paris, Sutton met with the major dealer of Impressionist work, Paul Durand-Ruel, who was enthusiastic about trying out this new art on a virgin audience. Perhaps America would be more receptive than France.

On April 10, 1886, the year of the last group show by the Impressionists in Paris, Durand-Ruel's exhibit of nearly 300 paintings opened at the American Art Association on Madison Square. The works included Monet, Manet, Boudin, Degas, Signac, Pissarro, Sisley, Berthe Morisot, Renoir, and Seurat; with Monet, Degas, Pissarro, and Renoir each having nearly forty works on display. As Towner writes: "Almost unimaginable, certainly overwhelming, was the light-drowned, color-drenched panorama that greeted the bustled and



bewhiskered patrons on their labyrinthine progress from Gallery A through Gallery E" [32].

Whether or not New Yorkers were particularly receptive to this contemporary art is much debated, yet these Impressionist paintings did have an effect on the art world. The Frenchman, Rene Brimo, feels that the Impressionists were not laughed at in America and that they aroused the curiosity of the public. Saarinen argues that due to the lack of an Academy to influence taste in America, the Impressionists were not seen as being particularly radical. However, Towner writes that the press was critical if not openly adverse to the Parisians: "The artists, all so different, were dismissed en masse, as were the paintings, whether technically impressionist or not. None of the wretches could draw, not Degas, not Manet" [33]. Durand-Ruel's exhibit was at the American Art Academy for only a month.

Yet the paintings did not leave New York. M. Durand-Ruel simply moved to a new site, the National Academy of Design on 23rd St. He added twenty-one pictures to the exhibit, undoubtedly due to the fact that the first exhibit had enticed American collectors to buy fifteen pictures, for a total of \$17,000. Of these purchases M. Durand-Ruel writes to Fantin Latour: "'Don't think that the Americans are savages,...On the contrary, they are less ignorant, less bound by routine than our French collectors'" [34]. The



artists chosen by these five collectors include Monet, Renoir, Sisley and Pissarro. Thus the Impressionists had established a small but firm footing in the hearts of American collectors, and in 1887, a year later, Durand-Ruel returned to New York to hold a second show, and then in 1886 to establish a branch of his Paris gallery at 297 Fifth Avenue. America's most famous collections had begun. "There were no honors from the Salons listed in that wan, unprepossessing pamphlet, no ribbons, prizes, laurels, no mention of the Legion of Honors. But in the galleries were the pictures Durand-Ruel predicted would one day become a century's glory" [35]. Thus by 1887, due to low prices, the allure of French items, and Durand-Ruel's influence, the Impressionists had been introduced and hesitantly received by Americans.

The next big exhibit of the period was in Chicago in 1893. By winning the site of the Columbian Exposition, Chicago formally joined the world of art. Saarinen writes: "The city was in the flush of the energetic expansion which changed it from a prairie town to what its promoters called 'The Infant Municipal Prodigy of the World'" [36]. Chicago was intent on making the celebration of Columbus's discovery of America the largest and grandest celebration Americans had ever seen.



The Art Palace of the Chicago exhibition included five acres of galleries- over twice the wall space provided at the Centennial Exhibition. The works hung in these galleries represented countries all over the world and included contemporary achievements as well as Old Masters. The French section included Barbizon and Impressionist works by artists such as Corot, Millet, Diaz, Courbet, Rousseau, Manet, Renoir, Degas, Pissarro and Sisley. One critic wrote of Degas' work: "'they are of little value except as specimens of the Impressionist school from a man who seldom completes a picture and yet is hailed by his brethren as one of the most talented and original artists of his day'" [37].

This inclusion of Impressionist works in such a major exhibition with 23,500,000 visitors was a great feat. Mrs Potter Palmer of Chicago served on the board of the Fair, and contacted Mary Cassatt to paint a mural for the Women's Building. In addition, it was Mrs. Palmer and Mr. Alexander Cassatt (Miss Cassatt's brother) who lent the majority of the Impressionist works for the exhibit. The Fair celebrated the tremendous development of Chicago, and marked a growing awareness of the Impressionists, and by 1900 they were nearly "academic."





The exhibit that marks the end of the Impressionists' status as shocking "modern" art is the Armory Show of 1913. Constable writes: "Broadly speaking, collectors now realised that contemporary art, and especially French contemporary art, was something different from Impressionism"[38]. The new art by painters such as Cezanne, Van Gogh, Matisse, Picasso, and Duchamp-Villon made the Impressionists seem traditional. The public's reaction was fierce and violent, ranging from verbal and written attacks to physical riots. Lynes notes: "They expected to surprise and shock the public. They did not expect to start riots, alert vice squads, and be burned in effigy by students" [39]. The Armory Show established new criteria for modern art and added to the respectability of Impressionism.

America's knowledge of art developed quickly between 1876 and 1913 due to these varied exhibits. The people behind the organisation of these exhibits included the dealers and advisors who aided prospective buyers in choosing works of art, advisors such as Mary Cassatt, Durand-Ruel, and Joseph Duveen. As an Impressionist artist and an American, Cassatt was in a unique position to advise Americans. As mentioned above, her own exhibit in 1879 helped to pave the way for the subsequent interest in Impressionist works shown by American collectors. She also sold her paintings in Philadelphia, her hometown, and developed a reputation as an artist. Her life



in Europe began in 1868 at age 23, and she made a few trips later between France and America. She directly influenced three major collectors: Mrs. H.O. Havemeyer, Mrs. Potter Palmer, and Mr. James Stillman. Louisine Elder studied in Paris as a young girl and was encouraged by Mary Cassatt to purchase Degas sketches. Later, after Louisine married Henry O. Havemeyer, Miss Cassatt became their official consultant for the purchase of their vast art collection of Impressionists and Old Masters.

In the 1880's, Cassatt began actively buying Degas works for herself and her brother Alexander Cassatt. In addition, she aided Durand-Ruel, her dealer, with his 1886 New York exhibit. She was asked in 1892 by Mrs. Potter Palmer of Chicago and asked to paint for the Columbian Exposition. Mrs. Palmer began buying Impressionist works with Cassatt's advice. Later in the century, Cassatt became a friend and advisor of Mr. James Stillman, the American banker who had retired to Parc Monceau in Paris. He bought Impressionist works through Cassatt. Thus her influence was felt by the collectors exhibitors, and dealers.

Durand-Ruel, through whom she bought and sold works, was the vital link between the buying public and the producing artists. Mary Cassatt was the promoter but Paul Durand-Ruel was the salesman. He displayed his wares in New York in 1886 and prompted decades of buying Impressionist works. His



gallery in New York became nearly as famous as Joseph Duveen's.

Durand-Ruel sold paintings and Duveen sold collections. Duveen carefully chose and cultivated his collectors. As Behrman states: "Duveen was not selling merely low upkeep, social distinction, and watermarks; he was selling immortality" [40]. Duveen educated American millionnaires like Rockefeller, Mellon, Morgan, Whitney, and Carnegie on how to spend their money lavishly and to cloak their wealth in respectability. Unlike Durand-Ruel, he dealt in million dollar paintings and collections and thus was removed from the market of Impressionists: "Duveen was never eager to sell anything painted after 1800, because the fertility of the nineteenth-century painters would have sadly upset the Duveen economy of scarcity" [41]. The majority of the great American collectors, Rockefeller, Vanderbilt, and Morgan, dealt in Duveens, buying in bulk paintings that they rarely appreciated individually. Other collectors, under the tutelage of Cassatt and Durand-Ruel, formed their collections a painting a at a time, carefully considering each artists and whether or not it would blend with the rest of their gallery. These are the collectors decribed in this work.



## UNIT II: Collectors of Impressionism

The collectors who developed in America between 1876 and 1913 were each unique, despite their similar environments. Each collected for personal as well as philanthropic reasons, yet the items they chose varied widely from Chinese porcelains, to Old Masters, to Italian Primitives and Impressionist. Fox writes that collecting traditional works was safer, a sure investment: "Most collectors preferred investing in objects of secure and permanent value to gambling on the contemporary art market" [42]. The collectors of Impressionism were taking a risk on paintings that might never be very valuable, simply because they appealed to their taste. The Impressionists were contemporary, of the current era. In Fuller's novel one character explains: "'In my young days it was all Bierstadt and De Haas; there wasn't supposed to be anything beyond. But as soon as I began to hear about Millet and the Barbizon crowd, I saw there was. . . I want to move; I want to keep right up with the times and the people'" [43].

These admirers of French Impressionist art were avant-garde individuals [44]. Their collections reflect a particular time when "...the collectors began - far in advance of Paris itself - to buy the 'modern art' of France" [45]. La Farge writes: "Later the possible changes of manner of life, the displacements of fortune, or of inheritance are likely to





alter these conditions and to make these collections lose their personal character, to destroy the record of first origins and to mass all together in a more commonplace appearance" [46]. Rene Brimo describes collectors as curious, a little strange, diligent, useless; they are unique people and "For each of them, the collecting of art was a primary means of expression" [47].

The collections that we will focus on are located in four major American cities: Philadelphia, New York, Boston and Chicago. These cities provided a milieu of historical events, exhibits, and wealth for the development of the collections. Museums, dealers, and friends advised the collectors, but their individual tastes were the final determinant.

In each chapter, the history of the arts is provided for that city in order to give a background to the collections themselves. The collectors are organized in three sections: those that collected French Academic and Barbizon works, the collectors of mostly Impressionist works, and their successors who collected Post-Impressionist and modern art. Thus the period is more closely defined with the predecessors and successors included.



## Chapter Three: Philadelphia

Philadelphia, early in the history of the union, was the artistic center of the country. Its academies, writers, and scholars such as Benjamin Franklin formed the intellectual core in America throughout the 18th and early 19th centuries. This city was the nation's capital from 1787 to 1800, and according to Strahan, George Washington's presence attracted many French allies, strongly influencing Philadelphia's formation of the arts. As more French immigrants arrived during the period of the French Revolution, the French flavor of the city increased. In 1805 the Philadelphia Academy of the Fine Arts was founded, its collection including plaster casts of sculpture from the Louvre. It was under the influence of Charles Wilson Peale that Philadelphia in the late 19th century developed into a great center of the arts.

Philadelphia's collectors included Mrs. Gillingham Fell, Mrs. W.P. Willstach, and Mr. C.H. Wolff, all of whom collected Barbizon and genre works. Of Mr. Willstach Saarinen writes: "...it seemed completely natural to spend the rest of his life collecting fashionable contemporary art to go into his fashionable contemporary house" [48]. The artists they collected include Millet, Corot, Rousseau, Daubigny, and Diaz. These collections are important because they reflect Philadelphia's shift in taste from traditional works towards non-academic artists. The collectors showed the



determination to find and appreciate an art that was little known even in France; "To have found these pictures, to have worried them out among the afflicting masses of trash that are poured upon the buyer in Paris, seems to argue the possession of a sixth sense, a touchstone of the artistic" [49].

Mary Cassatt was a product of the nineteenth century Philadelphia art world. She took classes at the Academy of Fine Arts, yet tired of studying plaster casts. She wanted an art that reflected her times and her environment. Like the collectors who saw the Barbizon artists as painters of ". . . instructive specimens of the national art, showing its contempt of flippancy, its voluntary restriction of subjects, and its direct aim at the simple impression of nature in each study' [50], Mary Cassatt valued the artistic, simple rendering of the visual world. Yet her greatest contribution to the arts in Philadelphia ". . . was the result not of her brush but of her extraordinary eye for quality and her ability to convince those who could afford first-quality paintings to buy them" [51]. She persuaded her brother Alexander Cassatt, President of the Pennsylvania Railroad System, to purchase Impressionist works beginning in 1881. Alexander began by purchasing paintings by Pissarro, Monet and Degas, and Mr. Cassatt wrote to Alexander on April 18, 1881: "'When you get these pictures you will probably be the only person in Philadelphia who owns specimens of either of the Masters.



Mame's friends the Elders, have a Degas and a Pissarro and Mame thinks that there are no others in America. If exhibited at any of your fine arts shows they will be sure to attract attention" [52].

Thus it was under Mary Cassatt's tutelage that Philadelphia began collecting Impressionism, and Cassatt's own works were sold in the Philadelphia area. One of Philadelphia's collectors was John G. Johnson, a corporate lawyer who was appointed to the Supreme Court and to the position of U.S. Attorney General. He watched his clients, America's new millionaires, pay hundreds of thousands of dollars for paintings: "They were pursuing what he called High Art. They sought Great Names and paid Great Prices, but undeniably they acquired Great Pictures" [53], Johnson however used different criteria for his collecting: "He would build a collection by depending on acumen rather than money and by seeking pictures rather than Names" [54].

Johnson's collection was formed one painting at a time and each work had to pass his careful scrutiny. He cultivated his own taste, consulting scholars and experts, forming strong opinions that enabled him to resist the guileful dealers and their wares. He is described by Behrman as ". . . one of the most discriminating of American collectors" [55]. He began with contemporary artists, choosing many fine Impressionist works and branched off into the field of Old Masters,





purchasing with great skill and knowledge works that the millionaire glory seekers had overlooked. He became respected in Philadelphia art and legal circles: "He was doing it so well, in fact, that in 1895 he was appointed to the Fairmont Park Art Association and put in special charge of the Willstach Collection...[150 paintings]" [56]. Slowly his Philadelphia home began to overflow with art, but he could never resist the challenge of a good, wise purchase. Katz describes his home after his death as having Chardins in the boot closets and French Impressionists on the servant's staircase. Yet while his means of display were random, his purchases were not: "His acquisitions represented a conscientious contemporary cross-section, all the way from such traditional items as a discreetly gauze covered nymph to such advanced ones as paintings by Degas and Pissarro and Manet's spirited painting of the 'Alabama and Kersage'" [57].

Albert C. Barnes, another wealthy man from Philadelphia (a doctor who invented the antiseptic ARGYROL) also purchased his paintings very discriminatingly. He began with Impressionist works, emphasizing the paintings of Renoir, then collected the most modern art being produced by Matisse and Picasso, under the vast influence of Leo Stein. Ultimately Barnes owned fifty each of the best Matisses and Renoirs in the country.



Thus, Philadelphia's collectors of Impressionism, Alexander Cassatt, John G. Johnson and Albert C. Barnes reflect the theme of the very rich collector who under the guidance of others, begins to collect art. They were shaped in an artistic milieu that had sponsored the Centennial Exhibition, the collection of Barbizon works, and the artist Mary Cassatt. Both of these collectors were very wealthy and Barnes in particular was influenced by his travels to Paris. But perhaps the most powerful factor influencing their collections were their own personalities: Johnson's discriminating taste for the rare and uncollected, and Barnes's similar taste in Matisse.



## Chapter Four: New York

New York in the early 19th century, was a mere village in comparison with Boston and Philadelphia; "In those days there were cornfields and trout streams long before one reached what is now Times Square, though imaginary streets had been surveyed and mapped as far north as One Hundred and Fifty-fifth Street, a fact which caused much hilarity, for it seemed to be carrying optimism to the point of absurdity" [58]. Yet New York's growth was phenomenal: the 1840's saw over 60,000 visitors every six months arrive in its streets, and its harbors and railroads linked it with nearly all major cities of the world. Business and commerce grew exponentially, and tremendous wealth and prosperity flourished.

New York's growth was manifest in physical achievements such as the East River Bridge and the Brooklyn Bridge. The latter was begun in the 1860's and completed in 1883 and was a symbol of the technical prowess of America. The harbors and rivers of the city were dredged and smoothed, and the city shot upward due to the innovative use of the elevator, iron and steel. An elevated transit system revolutionized urban travel, and communication was transformed by the telephone. This growth and subsequent pride also manifested itself in the arts: "But more than ever before, as an indication of advanced thought, we have been adorning our streets and parks



with works of art representative of men and events worthy to be remembered" [59]. Art civilized the rapid growth of New York and provided a link with past traditions. New York quickly became one of the greatest of America's cultural centers, and by the 1880's it could be said: "Boston and Philadelphia, once rival centers of the pseudo-aristocracy, struggled to keep up but fell behind. The West was beyond the pale. The South sulked and licked its wounds. The New World Babylon was unquestionably New York" [60].

The New York Academy of Fine Arts was founded in 1802, leading the public towards an appreciation of the fine arts. Between 1840 and 1860, five new galleries were formed, including the NY Gallery of Fine Arts, Lyceum Gallery, Dusseldorf Gallery, Crystal Palace, and the International Art Institute. New Yorkers were definitely becoming art conscious. Philadelphia's 1876 exhibit had its effects on New York, as Wilson notes: "Since 1876 the architecture of New-York has been distinctly of a higher class; her statues. . . have shown a higher public standard of art; new industries have sprung up, directly traceable to the influence of the exposition. . ." [61]. Another new influence on New York was France's gift of the statue of Liberty Enlightening the World by Bartholdi. In 1876 Bartholdi did a statue of Lafayette for Union Square, but the Statue of Liberty was his most spectacular work, commissioned by France as a gift for





America's centennial celebration. The Torch was placed at the exhibition grounds at Philadelphia, and the completed work was brought to New York in 1886. This statue perhaps best symbolizes the pride and standing that New York had gained in the world, and the city's high regard for France and its art.

In 1877 the Society of American Artists was founded, and this group with its 1886 exhibit of French Impressionist art, launched New York fully into the art world. American art was not appreciated so Durand-Ruel was invited to bring work by contemporary French artists to New York to entice the public. A small group of collectors such as E.F. Milliken, George N. Tyner, Alfred A. Pope, and James F. Sutton of the American Art Association became his followers. The beginnings were slow, but it was in New York that the Impressionists were to find their first great admirers.

As in Philadelphia, the Barbizon artists paved the way for American collectors of French non-academic art. The collectors of Corot, Diaz, Millet, Daubigny, and Rousseau included Albert Spencer, M. Graham, William Rockefeller, Cornelius Vanderbilt, Paran Stevens, and Erwin Davis. J.P. Morgan, in addition to collecting Old Masters, acquired Corot and Diaz. To Morgan, art collecting was synonymous with great wealth, and by buying the largest and greatest collections in the world, he equated himself with Napoleon and the Russian czars. But Morgan's eyes looked away from contemporary art.



It was Milliken, Sutton, Davis, and Tyner who swung New York collecting towards Impressionism.

Milliken began with Corot, Millet, and Puvis de Chavannes and went on to add the Impressionists. His taste is described by Brimo as ahead of his time, for he collected paintings by Manet, Monet, Degas, Renoir, and Sisley. James F. Sutton was also charmed by the modern French artists, especially Monet: "He covered the walls of his home with scenes of Bennecourt and Giverny and piled up an overstock of Monets at the galleries in Madison Square" [62]. By 1889, New York seems to have been conquered by the Impressionists. Erwin Davis, who also bought Barbizon works, donated two Manets to the Metropolitan Museum of Art which had been founded in 1870. These works include the celebrated "Woman with a Parrot" that shocked many audiences with its direct and realistic style. George Tyner's collection, in Holyoke, Massachusetts, included works by Monet, Pissarro, and Sisley.

These aforementioned collections were small in scale and included many other styles. Two other collections, however, were enormous and included large numbers of Impressionist paintings. These collections were amassed by the Havemeyers and Stillman. Both were extremely wealthy, both were advisees of Mary Cassatt, and both had traveled widely, especially in France.



Louisine and Henry Havemeyer built a huge art collection. Its breadth and depth characterize it as one of the most comprehensive collections ever made. Saarinen writes: "The Havemeyer collection would be remarkable if it contained only its wonderful French paintings and Degas bronzes or its fine Oriental and Near Eastern art. . . But the Havemeyer collection is yet more remarkable because, under Mary Cassatt's guidance, the collectors also sought those old masters who made a link with the moderns" [63].

Great wealth is naturally a prerequisite to a collection of Impressionists, Old Masters, Oriental and Near Eastern art. The Havemeyers' wealth was due to their association with the sugar refining industry, an association which developed into a trust (the American Sugar Refining Co.) in 1887. Collecting for them was not a mere outlet for excess wealth; they garnered sincere pleasure from purchasing works of art. In her memoirs, Louisine Havemeyer (Nee Elder) writes: "Mr. Havemeyer was the most generous amateur I ever knew. The pleasure he gave seemed to rebound to him again. He tried to make his friends enjoy art as he did" [64]. Mrs Havemeyer wished to possess art, not mere trinkets or bibelots; of one of Manet's paintings she writes: "It inspired me to answer a guest who had asked if I would prefer a string of pearls to a picture. 'No,' I said hastily, ' I prefer to have something made by a man than to have something made by an oyster'" [65].



At the age of eighteen or nineteen (according to F. Weitzenhoffer), her interest in art began to be developed. Louisine Elder was sent to study in Paris; of France she later writes: "But of all the countries, perhaps France is the one whose art is most 'of the people and for the people'" [66]. The art was definitely for her, as witnessed in the early purchase of a Degas pastel, a Repetition de Ballet. This purchase, guided by Mary Cassatt, began Louisine's education in Impressionism. She writes: "I scarce knew how to appreciate it, or whether I liked it or not, for I believe it takes special brain cells to understand Degas. . . ." [67]. However, like her friend Miss Cassatt, there was nothing wrong with her brain cells, and she went on to buy many more of Degas's works, perhaps, as she writes in her memoirs, helping Degas out of financial despair.

Saarinen writes of Elder's collecting: "Such was the pattern. Miss Cassatt was the introducer, the explainer, the interpreter who infected Mrs. Havemeyer with zeal about an artist" [68]. Cassatt's influence began early and lasted both their lifetimes, for she was constantly introducing new art and works to the Havemeyers for consultation. It was after Louisine's marriage to Mr. Havemeyer that their collecting became earnest. They visited Degas's studio and Durand-Ruel's gallery to choose new works. Henry Havemeyer's interest was gradually shifted from vases to paintings and he became an





ardent supporter of Impressionism.

Cassatt not only made contacts between the artists and prospective buyers, but also persuaded buyers that Impressionist art was acceptable and worthy of their patronage. Enthusiastic as the Havemeyers were, even they needed convincing, especially in the case of Manet. One of his paintings, the "El Espada," was very large and Mrs Havemeyer felt that her husband would think it was too big. Cassatt argued: "'Don't be foolish. . . It is just the size Manet wanted it, and that ought to suffice for Mr. Havemeyer; besides, it is a splendid Manet, and I am sure he will like it if you buy it'" [69]. Cassatt very deftly appealed to the Havemeyers' social standing, and desire to improve their collection: "' I am doing this for you, dear! I really think it is a chance and your collection of Degas ought to be very complete with these two pictures and the pastel; it too , is a very fine thing'" [70].

Thus with constant prodding and encouragement, the Havemeyer's collection of Impressionism grew. While in New York, they visited Durand-Ruel's exhibits and purchased many works. Another dealer, Portier, visited the Havemeyers on their trips to Paris, and provided them with access to private collections. But it was their contact with the artists themselves that fueled the flame of the art patronage. One visit to Degas was particularly memorable: "We realized that



we were the fortunate possessors, not only of his best drawings, but of those he wished us to have. No word of price was spoken. It was a solemn moment and all details had to be arranged by our kind intermediary, Mary Cassatt" [71].

The Havemeyers were no longer mere purchasers of art, they were collectors. As their knowledge grew, so did their appreciation of the artists and the paintings in their collection. Mrs. Havemeyer writes in her memoirs: "How little we of the foothills know of the difficulties and weariness of those that tread the narrow path that leads its pilgrims to the high realm of great creative art!" [72]. Mrs. Havemeyer came to appreciate the talent and inspiration of these artists, and thus to appreciate the works themselves. She writes: "You must hear the voice calling to you, you must respond to the vibrations Manet felt, which made his heart throb and filled his brain, which stirred his emotions and sharpened his vision as he put his brush upon the canvas" [73]. Her romantic views of art fueled her desire to possess and to learn more about her paintings and their creators.

Her appreciation of the artist reflects in her writings on the paintings themselves; of Degas's works she writes: ". .the wonderful envelopment of air gives them such buoyancy that one stands entranced at the marvelous skill that could produce such an effect and at the wonderful eye that could thrill you with such a piece of color" [74]. Her taste and



appreciation were ahead of her time, and she notes that Manet's "Le Bal de l'Opera" was not appreciated by the visitors to her gallery, so she hung it in her private apartment. The Havemeyers also collected for the benefit of the general public. They would purchase paintings that were "unsuitable" for their private collection just so that they would be in America to add to our cultural wealth. They purchased quickly, thus obtaining paintings that they might not appreciate at the time but later came to cherish. Their rule was: ". . . great works of art can never supply the demand and that they do not become cheaper, therefore beware of allowing an opportunity to pass you by" [75].

The Havemeyer collection reflects an avant garde view of art in its large holdings of Impressionist works. Their collection includes nearly 50 Degas, and works by Manet, Monet, Pissarro, Renoir and Cassatt. These paintings were new and daring, from Manet's realism and loose brush stroke, to the nearly fluorescent colors of Degas's later works. The setting for these "modern" paintings was a special house, the interior of which was designed by Tiffany to house the collection. Mrs. Havemeyer admonished those collectors who placed Impressionist works in gilt frames against red brocade or velvet backgrounds. To one accustomed to viewing Degas, Manet, and Monet in a well lighted, stark modern museum the photograph of the Havemeyer gallery appears bizarre indeed,



resembling the great gallery at the Louvre. Mrs. Havemeyer did worry about proper diffuse lighting and stated that " ' The whole house is a background for the objects it contains' " [76]. She was in advance of her time, and the visitors to her private gallery must have been amazed. The Havemeyer collection was intended for more than private contemplation however, for in 1929 upon Mrs. Havemeyer's death, nearly 2,000 items were left to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, making it the largest collection of Impressionism examined here.

Another large scale New York collector who was influenced by Mary Cassatt was James Stillman, a banker. Stillman's energy and talent built one of the largest banking centers of the country and his business partners included J.P. Morgan. Banking was his life's work: "Through and by means of his Bank, James Stillman fully expressed his belief that 'the greatest possible service to mankind, rich or poor, was the establishing of sound financial institutions as the foundations of business'" [77]. His efforts materialised into great wealth, and he became a major figure in the eyes of the New York public; however he was a very private man: "The only way to rid oneself of the nuisance [a prying public] was to go away and settle down in a country where the right to individual privacy was better understood" [78]. This country was France, and Stillman established his home on Rue Rembrandt





in Paris.

For wealthy Americans, Paris oozed charm and luxury from every pore and Stillman was enraptured, as Henry James had been; Stillman writes: "' But no one should come to France until they are sixty...It is too hard to leave'" [79]. In France, he began to relax and enjoy life again; he needed a release from the strain of New York. An additional release, apart from simply living abroad, was collecting art. His friend Mary Cassatt told him: "' The Realm of art is also consoling and gives one serenity. One must distract one's mind from worrying and place one's interest elsewhere. I cannot bear to think of you worried and depressed and alone over here..." [80]. He enjoyed collecting and bought for pleasure. He admired nature and this perhaps, with the advice of Cassatt, led him to the Impressionists. His descriptions of his journeys to the French countryside are almost as vivid as the paintings he collected: "The whole country is one blaze of color, fields upon fields of many varieties of roses, and some as big as cabbages, poppies, brilliant red gladiolas and wild flowers innumerable. The new leaves of the olive trees are like those of the silver poplar. The orange trees are in blossom and their fragrance fills the air'" [81].



Cassatt probably first met Stillman through her brother, Alexander, who was a business associate of Stillman. Their friendship quickly developed into more than an acquaintance, and " When she came to Paris in the winters, she threw herself with great zeal into his collecting plans, ... she pursued his artistic education in her own fiery way and was ever a loyal and sympathetic friend" [82]. Stillman collected Impressionists including Mary Cassatt's own work in addition to works by Gainsborough, Ingres, Murillo, Moroni, Rembrandt and Titian, proudly invited friends to visit his gallery at Rue Rembrandt. "Filling his home with their subdued richness and color, these acquisitions formed a background for the central figure which yet was not dwarfed by them. The master of the house moved quietly among his paintings and tapestries, with an un-American repose" [83]. Collecting became an important part of his life, and developed a side of his character that the cold, severe, businessman Stillman seemed to ignore.

In Farmington, Connecticut, Alfred A. Pope and the Whittemores focused their collections nearly exclusively on the new French art produced by Monet, Degas, Renoir, and Manet. Pope's wealth was gained in Cleveland with the Cleveland Malleable Iron Co., and like Stillman, he retired and began collecting works of art. From 1890 until his death in 1913, he formed a collection that was to become Hill-Stead



Museum in Farmington. He purchased many of his works from Durand-Ruel in New York, and other dealers. La Farge writes in 1907: "Mr. Pope is an ardent admirer of this virile art [Monet] as of the dainty fastidiousness of Whistler, and the first picture he ever purchased is that 'View of the Bay and Maritime Alps at Antibe' which is one of Monet's most astonishing realizations of clear and brilliant sunshine' [84].

Describing a Monet La Farge writes: "It is painted with entire simplicity and directness, its large tones laid simply and flatly in place..." [85] and one of the Degas: "The bright sharp pink of their tulle skirts is a note that no old master would have dared, but the whole picture is based upon it..." [86]. Pope had only a few paintings by each artist, a small collection to decorate his home in Farmington, and he stopped collecting when he ran out of wall space. La Farge describes this collection's setting: "There is no museum-like crowding of beautiful things, yet beautiful things are everywhere; a few good pieces of old china here and there, Japanese prints, a Durer engraving or two, etchings by Meryon and Haden and Whistler, and some thirty paintings of the most modern schools, choice works, selected with a fine discrimination and hanging well apart with a luxury of space that emphasises their individual beauty" [87].



Alfred Pope's friends in Connecticut, the Whittemores, also collected Impressionism due to the influence of Durand-Ruel and a few visits by Cassatt. Their collection included works by Monet, Renoir, Degas, Manet, Sisley, Morisot and Cassatt. But the collection has been dispersed.

New York was at the forefront with the acceptance of this new French art. Its prosperity and growth spurred a new interest in the arts, and due to the many exhibits, advisors, and trips abroad, the Impressionists became popular artists to collect. Unlike Philadelphia, New York had very little traditional or academic art center, thus it was more open to accepting contemporary works. As we shall see in Chapter 7, the donations from collectors such as the Havemeyers have left the Metropolitan Museum of Art with a rich legacy of Impressionist painting.





## Chapter Five: Boston

Boston in the 19th century was the center for intellectual and cultural activity in the North. Its many universities and colleges gave it great standing in the academic world, and the arts flourished in the stimulating environment. As explained in the following excerpt, Boston was the center for travel in America: "...Boston was still the hub of the most thickly settled and greatest industrial section of the country. Naturally New England was the section of heaviest travel, and there were perhaps more strangers on the streets of Boston at this time than on those of New York or Philadelphia..." [88]. Stages, boats, and steamers connected the city with the rest of America and the world. Contact with Europe was frequent, for this was the era of the "grand tour." In addition, the young people were often educated in Europe, and developed into amateurs of the arts quite early. Saarinen writes of Boston: "Of all American cities, it took itself most seriously. It stood for virtue and for intellect" [89].

As depicted in the novels of Henry James, America and in particular Boston, was becoming increasingly disillusioned with itself. Wealthy Bostonians saw America as culturally inferior to the rest of the world, and as the 19th century progressed the country grew more and more complex and they longed to escape to Europe: "They felt as if the labours of



their fathers had been mocked, as if their country had been wrested from them; and they looked across the sea again, despairing of a nation that had passed beyond their comprehension. In their breasts rose once more a hankering for the ancient homeland, as if three generations of history had gone for nothing" [90].

Of the three cities examined here, Boston was the closest intellectually, spiritually, and geographically (transport) with Europe, thus it is not surprising that its collectors of art turned to the Old World for artifacts. The first contemporary art collected was the Barbizon school, and Boston was the first in appreciating these artists: "The vogue for these painters had started in Boston in the mid eighteen eighties - long before they were fully accepted in France - when wealthy, social Bostonians like S.D. Warren, Quincy Adams Shaw, and Martin Brimmer bought their paintings" [91]. Collecting Barbizon painters led to the appreciation of the Impressionists, like Monet, and Constable notes: "There [Boston] Monet was so much admired that it was rare to find a house in which there were any paintings at all, where there was not one or more by Monet hanging by the side of older masters" [92].



The collectors of Barbizon painting in Boston included Brimmer, Shaw, Thomas Wigglesworth, and H.P. Kidder. They collected Millet, Rousseau, Courbet, Daubigny, Diaz, and Corot, Wigglesworth and Shaw having the largest collections. These collectors played a large role in Boston's art world, for they introduced the city to non-academic art, and they appreciated these artists when France did not. Of Shaw, Strahan writes: "He was one of those appreciative and sympathetic American friends who dawned upon Millet in his gloomiest hour at Barbizon, when poverty was a darkness that could be felt, and French experts had not learned to place even a reasonably paying estimate on his finest works" [93].

Saarinen notes the popularity of the Barbizon artists: "Boston in those post- Civil War years that Van Wyck Brooks calls its Indian Summer, gave a welcoming nod to the French painters of the Barbizon School and a misty day was called 'a Corot day'" [94]. Isabella Stewart Gardner was the central figure in late 19th century Boston's social and artistic circles. For her, art collecting was a natural result of her social position and wealth, and she felt almost regal in her home surrounded by great art. Brimo describes Mrs Gardner as rivaling J.P. Morgan as America's most famous collector, and says her home, Fenway Court, was a kind of royal court where she gathered all the major personalities, the great musicians, artists, and writers, who arrived in Boston.



Her world was like that of an Italian "mecenat" and she considered it no small coincidence that her name was the same as Isabella d'Este, the Renaissance art patron. Mrs. Gardner collected painting under the guidance of Bernard Berenson and Charles Eliot Norton. Berenson was one of the few art historians in nineteenth century America and he encouraged Gardner to take classes with Norton at Harvard. Norton as of 1873 was the first art history professor at the University. Her tastes were developed by these men and her own personal preferences. She felt that she deserved the best and would be satisfied with little else. Saarinen writes: "Isabella Stewart Gardner, like most interesting and rewarding people, was an egoist. Like all egoists, she was driven by vanity. Hers was no mean vanity: it was cosmic and insatiable" [95]. Her personality, wealth and social position made her open to attack by others, and according to Brimo, her only true pleasure was in the art surrounding her at Fenway Court.

Fenway Court is described by Saarinen: "There, tastefully at home with Gothic crucifixes, Chinese bronzes, aged and lovely Renaissance velvets and terra-cotta reliefs were old master paintings of a quality Americans hardly knew" [96]. Her home was a true survey of art history, for she even collected contemporary French art: Barbizon and Impressionist works, including paintings by Manet, Degas, and the American John Singer Sargent, alongside Vermeer, Rembrandt, Van Dyck,





Giorgione, Botticelli, Michelangelo, Titian, and Velasquez. In association with Old Masters, Impressionist works take on new meaning; La Farge writes of Degas: "And when Degas finds his category, I believe he will be valued, not with the so-called Impressionists, but in a school by himself, which, while as old as Egyptian portraiture, may fairly be called Parnassian, because it is scornful of all formulas, even the most engaging, and finds its joys in the rendering of the characteristic through that severe delineation which Ingres declared to be the 'prohibite de l'art'" [97].

Whether or not Gardner felt that Degas was an Impressionist, his work and that of others of his time, was often radically different in execution, theme, and color from that which had come before. Isabella's collection includes eight Degas, and two Manets. One Degas portrait, "Madame Gaujelin" is particularly radical in its candor and simplicity, its perceptive rendering of a young woman: "But the steady gaze of the controlling eyes above the quiet but resolute mouth is so astonishing as to mark the picture as something absolutely unique, something almost haunting in the perseverance of its impression" [98].

Three other Boston collectors stressed nearly exclusively Impressionism: John T. Spaulding, Desmond Fitzgerald, and Juliana Cheney Edwards. Spaulding, like Gardner, began with older artists (Rubens, Goya, Chardin, Daumier, Courbet) but



continued into the contemporary art scene to include Manet, Monet, Pissarro, Sisley, Degas, Renoir. The collection is housed today in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts.

Fitzgerald was a prolific collector of Impressionism. His interest in art began at the age of twelve when he spent a year in Paris studying art (1858). He returned to America to study engineering, and went on to become the chief engineer of the Boston and Albany Railroad. Before the age of thirty he was the hydraulic engineer and Superintendent of the western division of the Boston water works. At this same period his early interest in art developed in the direction of collecting. His advisor was Lelia Cabot Perry, a Paris trained Boston painter who was a friend of Monet. Constable notes that the Fitzgerald collection included over two hundred Impressionist paintings, many of which were by Monet. (Note: According to Dr. Fran Weitzenhoffer a posthumous sale of Fitzgerald's collection presented nine Monets, two Sisleys, seven Boudin, and one each of Renoir, Degas, and Pissarro). A year after his death in 1926, the collection was sold at auction in New York at the American Art Association.

Fitzgerald in turn, was the advisor of another collector: Juliana Cheney Edwards. Constable notes that: "... practically the whole of whose [Edwards] superb collection of Impressionists, with two fine Gainsboroughs and other older paintings, went to the Boston Museum by bequests of her son



and two daughters" [99]. Thus, the major collectors of Impressionism in Boston were Isabella Stewart Gardner and Desmond Fitzgerald. Yet as with Philadelphia, Boston was unable to compete with the dynamism and cosmopolitanism of the newer cities, New York and Chicago.



## Chapter Six: Chicago

In 1831, Chicago was a mere frontiertown of three hundred people, yet by 1850 the population had reached 28,000, and was up to 110,000 in 1862. Chicago was the gateway West, to the wonders of untapped resources and unlimited wealth. The development from village to metropolis occurred within the lifetime of a single individual, Constable writes: "These were the days of phenomenal expansion in Chicago, of blatant self-expression, and of declarations of freedom from Eastern example, which culminated in the Columbian Exposition of 1893 ..." [100].

Chicago faced the problem of shifting excessive self-pride and achievement towards the community. Tremendous financial gains were possible for an enterprising individual, yet few invested their wealth in improving the city. As fire roared through the town repeatedly, and new entrepreneurs came and made more money than ever dreamed possible, the founding fathers realized that to be remembered they must do something besides get rich. Fuller writes in his novel *With the Procession*: "'You know what we are destined to be - a hundred times greater than we are today. Fasten your name on the town, and your name will grow as the town itself does.'" [101]. The citizens learned that by improving the image of Chicago, they improved their own company's image. Thus a whole campaign of municipal projects began and the arts were





included.

Because of rapid growth, Chicago had had very little time to develop culturally. Wood notes: "Chicago has spanned the distance [from village to city] in fifty years; and while the maturing influence of age is yet to temper her youthful spirit, and touch the rude spots to be found here and there, with symmetry and elegance, she is already beautiful to behold and lovely to contemplate" [102]. Chicago had many rough spots, and culturally and aesthetically was considered inferior to Boston, New York and Philadelphia. But as wealthy businessmen began to turn towards civic activities, they became determined to make Chicago the best in technology and in art.

The artistic development of the city was greatly aided by the Great Fire of 1871, which destroyed the quickly erected wood frame buildings and forced the townspeople to discover new methods of construction. The result was a new school of architecture using the new improved metals, iron and steel, that allowed for buildings of great height. Chicago was at the forefront of America, and its new skyscrapers shocked the nation (Arnason). In addition to business edifices, Chicagoans were building new homes and they searched for new lavish decorations to fill the empty rooms. For inspiration they turned not to New York but to Paris; Saarinen notes that in the 1880's-90's: "Chicagoans bought French art - so early



and so much and so continuously that the Art Institute of Chicago today has the best representation of French nineteenth-century painting of any public museum in America." [103].

The great fire created a need for new artistic developments in Chicago and the Columbian Exposition of 1893 provided the inspiration as to what to collect. It was a great step in the history of Chicago to be awarded the site of the Exposition. Chicagoans had studied the Paris exposition in 1889 to get ideas for the Columbian that was to educate their city on taste. Fuller writes of Chicagoans: " 'So little taste ... so little training, so little education, so total an absence of any collective sense of the fit and the proper!' " [104].

The Columbian Exposition was successful in educating its visitors on taste, and it made Chicago aware of contemporary French art. Three major collectors of French Impressionism developed in Chicago: Mrs. Potter Palmer, Mr. Martin A. Ryerson, and Mrs. Lewis Larned Coburn. Mrs Palmer was the wife of "the first merchant prince of Chicago". Potter had been witness to and a participant in Chicago's amazing growth. Palmer's belief in Chicago gave him a position of eminence in the city: "Mr. Palmer entertains a just pride in Chicago and has spared no pains nor effort to render it the first city of the continent in the beauty of its streets, and the uniform



magnificence of its buildings" [105]. His success in retail merchandising made him very prosperous, and his Palmer House was famous among Chicago's Hotels. His social position merited a 1870 appointment to the post of Secretary of the Interior for President Grant which he declined.

Mrs. Palmer, because of her husband's wealth and civic concern, was in the midst of all of Chicago's social activity. She asserted her power, strength and intelligence to manipulate society and to embellish her own position. She was extremely active in all aspects of urban life, especially culture. She served on the Board of Lady Managers for Chicago's Columbian exhibition, and in this position selected Mary Cassatt to paint a mural for the Women's Building. Saarinen writes of Mrs. Palmer: "All her life she was an attractive, simple worshipper of what she had been told was the best - the best society, the best individuals, the best standard of life with all its appearances, including clothes, jewels and works of art. She expected the best as her queenly right" [106]. Her position was recognized by others for in 1900 President McKinley appointed her as the only woman commissioner of the United States to the Paris Exposition.

Their wealth, social position, and sense of civic duty led the Palmers toward art collecting under the guidance of Cassatt, who met Mrs Palmer in Paris in 1892 when the latter had been searching for painters for the Women's Building.



Their relationship resulted in the Palmer's acquisition of Impressionist works. The paintings that Mrs. Palmer brought to Chicago were revolutionary: she introduces Impressionism to that city (Saarinen), and because of her prominent position in Chicago society, she made the new art acceptable and even coveted. In 1922 her will left the Art Institute of Chicago some of its most popular works: two Manets, seven Monets, four Pissarros, four Renoirs and a Sisley.

While the Palmers were collecting Impressionism for themselves, Martin Ryerson was purchasing this contemporary French art directly for the Art Institute. Ryerson grew up in Chicago until age twelve when he was sent to boarding school in Paris like Louisine Elder Havemeyer. By twenty two he had graduated from the Harvard School of Law and was a practicing lawyer in Chicago. He later branched into the lumber business and by the age of forty had acquired sufficient wealth to retire from active business and pursue the career of a philanthropist. His time was divided between the Art Institute, the Field Museum, and the University of Chicago .

Ryerson's position in the Art Institute was as a governing member in 1887, to trustee until 1932 and included the offices of Vice President and President. His major role was to aid in purchasing and his choice of paintings was very eclectic. He traveled extensively abroad and purchased art for his own collection and that of the museum, buying such





works as Old Masters, and 19th century French painters. The Impressionists are now the focal point of Chicago's collection, largely due to the foresight of Ryerson: "He bought pictures by the Impressionists, and especially by Renoir, at a time when, to say the very least, they were considered poor investments; they were , indeed, considered by most collectors and many critics of the day to be outrageous daubs and an insult to refined taste" [107].

If the Impressionists were not acceptable to collectors with refined tastes, then perhaps Mrs. Lewis Larned Coburn had the right idea for choosing a painting; she consulted the maids in her Blackstone Hotel. Saarinen writes: "...Mrs Lewis Larned Coburn of Chicago depended upon the esthetic reactions of the chambermaids, waiters and other personnel who served her in Chicago's Blackstone Hotel" [108]. Her wealth enabled her to purchase works of art, for her husband was Chicago's great patent lawyer. They stood very high in the ranks of Chicago's society, and were very supportive of their city: "The welfare and growth of Chicago were always questions that lay close to his [Mr. Coburn] heart. He had remarkable faith in the future of the city even in its darkest hours, and because of this he made extensive investments in real estate which repaid him bountifully in his later years" [109]. If Mr. Coburn profited from his belief in Chicago, Chicago profited from his patronage for he was on the board at



the Art Institute, and with his wife collected works of art. Their collection included Renoir, Monet, and Degas, and like the collections of Ryerson and Palmer, was remarkable for its time.

Chicago had developed incredibly between 1830 and 1900 and its cultural achievements were highlighted by the World's Columbian Exposition. Just as its architects were at the forefront of their field designing skyscrapers, so were its collectors among the first in accepting the new Impressionist art. Chicago and Impressionism were accepted as major achievements almost simultaneously, so it seems appropriate that the Art Institute houses one of the best collections of Impressionist painting in the world.



## UNIT III: Our Legacy

Saarinen writes in the Proud Possessors: "'Private vices, public virtues.' wrote Sir John Mandville in the fourteenth century. In the story of art collecting in America, private possessions have become public pleasure" [110]. Most of the collections studied here are currently housed in museums from Philadelphia to Chicago. These museums embody two basic concerns: to preserve culture in America in the face of constant change, and to educate the public in the fine arts. In Engines of Culture, Fox notes the rising sense of anxiety in 19th century America due to rapid change; society needed some form of stability: "Many museum founders shared the concern of other prominent Americans that the family and the church were losing much of their civilizing and stabilizing power and the fear that millions of immigrants would modify the physical, social, and political structure of American cities beyond recognition" [111].

It was hoped that museums would not only help to maintain or recreate a sense of America's culture and unity, but would educate the public to better appreciate art. As noted earlier private collectors hoped to improve artistic taste in America and the founding of a museum was a very direct way to approach the situation. Fox writes of museum founders: "They viewed themselves as consecrated enthusiasts bringing Taste and Truth to the vulgar" [112]. Museums provide a place for the



assimilation of new art, for after repeated viewings, contemporary art becomes less and less radical. American museums combined philanthropy with social concern and education, something that was new in the museum field as Fox notes: "One result of this social concern on the part of philanthropists was that American art galleries, dependent on philanthropic and municipal support, combined the functions of acquisition, exhibition and exposition at an earlier date than most museums in Europe, which were conceived mainly as national or local treasure houses" [113].

Dependent largely upon individual bequests, American museums operated in close contact with collectors, aiding and advising them during the collecting process and trying to make museum donations attractive to the private collector. It was noted that many collectors worked with a strong sense of civic duty and national pride, thus the impetus to form museums was inherent in the process of collecting. Collectors needed to share their enthusiasm and to publicize their collecting in order to justify the huge amounts of money spent on art. In addition to private satisfaction and pleasure, museum donations became financially attractive as it became increasingly expensive to maintain a collection especially after the early 1900's when new tax laws began to collect revenue from art collectors. Towner writes: "For the collectors in the upper- most tax brackets, many of whom have





been lauded - and rightfully so - for their aesthetic enlightenment, giving away paintings turned out to be quite profitable" [114].



## Chapter Seven: The Museums

The link between the collector and the museum was very strong in the late 19th century and early 20th century America; they aided each other. Fox describes the situation: "These two developments are related: museum growth stimulated the art market, and the opportunity to convert whim into charity provided a moral justification for private collecting on any scale" [115]. The collections examined here were formed at the same period as the museums were in Philadelphia, New York, Boston, and Chicago. 1876 marks the date of the Pennsylvania Museums of Art's founding and this museum houses the collection of John G. Johnson, in addition to many paintings by Cassatt. Albert C. Barnes founded his own museum in 1922, the Barnes Foundation, to house his large collection, and the Philadelphia area gained another cultural gem.

New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, founded in 1876, developed an excellent collection due to the patronage of collectors such as Havemeyer and Stillman. The museum's collection grew so rapidly that by the 1890's a new wing was needed. The Havemeyers had donated thousands of objects directly through their wills and their children. The catalogue of the collection's exhibit notes that: "It was characteristic of the public spirit of herself and her family that having enjoyed the accumulation of these treasures



throughout her lifetime she should wish, and they should agree, to commit them permanently on her death to an institution in which they would be accessible to everybody, whether for enjoyment or instruction" [116].

By 1876 America had founded three large museums: the Pennsylvania Museum of Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and Boston's Museum of Fine Art. Boston also contains Fenway Court, the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. This museum was founded on the same principal as was used by Pope in Farmington, Conn. at Hill-Stead Museum: that art should be exhibited in a warm favorable environment like that of a home. Fenway Court was meticulously built by Mrs. Gardner and reflects the personality of the collector: "In reality this collection, if I may so use the word, is but the necessary filling in of a manner of poem, woven into the shape of a house by a mind recalling the likings and the memories of the past, and so much a creation that the mistress' own hand has mixed the very tones that colour the walls..." [117].

The final museum to be founded in these four cities was the Art Institute of Chicago in 1885. Because of the generosity of Mrs. Potter Palmer, Mr. Martin Ryerson, and Mrs. Lewis L. Coburn, the Art Institute's collection of Impressionist painting is splendid. It is interesting to note a comment written in 1939 on New York's Metropolitan Museum's collection: "Sixty years ago the general public thought the



Impressionists were either crazy or incompetent, because instead of painting a conventional imitation of natural detail they tried to capture changing effects of light and atmosphere by using dabs of bright, shimmering color" [118]. However a handful of Americans, such as Mary Cassatt, Mrs. H.O.

Havemeyer, Mr. Desmond Fitzgerald, and Mrs. Potter Palmer, appreciated the Impressionists in the 1880's and for the rest of the nineteenth century, and America's great museum collections are due to their foresight. Constable notes:

"This brief survey of American holding of Impressionist painting... justifies fully the remark of an eminent French authority when an exhibition in France of modern French painting was in question, 'Wouldn't it be better to have an exhibition of photographs of the paintings France should have bought and did not buy?'" [119].





## Afterword

Upon completion of this thesis I am faced with many avenues of future research. As with any major work, more and more questions were raised through the course of my research. By mentioning them here, I hope to inspire other students, myself included, who are interested in collectors.

The major personality that emerges from this work is Mary Cassatt due to her unique position as a liason between the U.S. and its collectors and Paris and its artists. Cassatt raises questions regarding the position of women in nineteenth century America, for she was a career artist who went to live on her own in Europe at twenty one. What do the prominent women collectors: Mrs. Havemeyer, Mrs. Gardner, Mrs. Palmer, Mrs. Coburn tell us about American society and their position in that society? Perhaps further research would uncover a special attraction these women had for Impressionism to explain the size of their collections, or even their taste for art and collecting. If their husbands were major figures in American business, their role may have naturally been to cultivate the arts.

The arts in general in nineteenth century America is an interesting subject, and perhaps by studying American painters of the period and the development of American Impressionism one could unearth another cause for the growth of these



collections. The most direct source of information would be the words of the collectors themselves. Further research could include newspaper and magazine articles, diaries, letters, obituaries, and travel books to discover what they felt about Impressionism.

The collectors of Impressionist art paid significantly lower prices for their paintings than Morgan and Rockefeller did, raising the topic of price as incentive for buying. Perhaps by carefully comparing prices for Impressionist works at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, one could establish evidence to support the growing popularity of these works. Another valuable comparison can be made between the market value of Impressionist paintings around the first World War and that of Post Impressionism and Modern art of the same period. A criteria in this study would be New York's Armory Show.

Finally, I would like to establish the influence these collectors had on Americans contemplating a "grand tour" to include Paris. By visiting such "galleries" as the Palmer's in Chicago and the Havemeyer's in New York, were prospective travelers even further intrigued by Paris and did this augment their preconceived view of the city? Much more work remains to be done on the nineteenth century American art world and in particular the interrelationship between Americans and Paris.



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